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Folksong and Socio-Cultural Change in Village Life

Suvanna Kriengkraipetch

Introduction

When they found themselves helpless, it was natural for them to turn to magic things for aids, with doctrines and conduct handed down traditionally, ... They are still people who do this; it is deep in their bones, they must perform one thing and another to be happy.¹

In olden times people who depended upon farming as their major source of income had knowledge and experience in planting. However, they still could not control such factors as weather and crop pests. Nothing was more frightening to them than natural disaster or the failure of crops. Because of such fear, ceremonies of making offerings to spirits and gods, and fertility rites were created, rites and ceremonies that still reveal evidence of original beliefs, behavior, and conduct. At the present time, even though modern technology has invaded the traditional farming system with advanced knowledge such as the selection of new improved breeds, the use of fertilizer, and modern irrigation systems, sometimes they still find themselves 'helpless,' and they naturally turn to 'magic things for aids,' as their ancestors did in the past. For example, people sometimes turn to traditional rain-making rites, Hae Nang Maeo (the Procession of a Cat), or Pan Mek

(Shaping the Cloud). People learn from their ancestors about the rituals and also the ceremonial songs which accompanied such rituals. Such songs have been transmitted from memory through generations without any written record.

It is not only in times of economic trouble that people turn to magic for help; they occasionally resort to traditional beliefs in magic in life crises, as well. Country people still carry out many ceremonies in order to ensure happiness and productivity in life. Also, in times of fun and relaxation, such as during village festivals, people oftentimes play games or perform certain types of entertainment that reveal a belief in animism through ceremonial games and songs. The words and content of such songs may not convey any significant message about their beliefs, but one cannot deny the significant role these songs play in people’s socio-cultural life. It will be interesting to see if changes in society will affect the function of these songs in the new environment.

This paper will focus mainly on two particular types of folksong: ceremonial songs and social songs. The analysis is based mostly on my field research on oral tradition in the village of Ban Hua Khao, Doembang Nangbuat district, Suphan Buri Province, from October 1982 – August 1983. The physical description of the village will be roughly given in order to provide some background about village life for anyone who may be not familiar with such lifestyle.

BAN HUA KHAO : Ethnographic setting and hamlet ecology

Ban Hua Khao is located in Hua Khao sub-district, Doembang Nangbuat district, which lies in the mountainous area in the northwest of Suphan Buri Province. It is approximately 50 kilometers from the city of Suphan Buri. Administratively, Hua Khao sub-district comprises ten named hamlets (or villages). All are quite close to each other and there are no formal village boundaries. Only villages no. 2, 6, and 10 which were the first settlements are called Ban Hua Khao. The three villages cover an area of about 16 square kilometers, with five irrigation canals and two natural ponds. During the dry season, people from these three villages voluntarily
join together to dredge and clean these two ponds which constitute their water supply.

No written documents of the history of the village are available. However, most elders of Ban Hua Khao say that about 300 hundred years ago, the people of Ban Hua Khao moved from Ban Don Krabuang, Muang Samchan because of an epidemic. In the past, this village was really a forest but their ancestors decided to stay because the land was very fertile and productive. There is water in the big pond all year round.

The census of 1980 showed 148 households with a population of 1,048 in village no.2; 162 households with 694 people in village no.6; and 58 households with 247 people in village no.10. Most of the villagers are Thai. It is worth noticing that, while the other districts of Suphan Buri have a large number of Laotian people, there are very few Laotian families in Doembang Nangbuat district.

The village has its own temple and the village school is located in the temple. The first abbot of the Hua Khao temple was very revered for his virtues. People also believe that he had the gift of prophecy.

Living standards in Ban Hua Khao are quite good compared to most villages in remote rural areas in the central region. As in most villages in the central region, farmers represent the great bulk of the population in Ban Hua Khao. Due to irrigation and the regulation of water supplied to the fields, the harvest in Hua Khao always produces a large yield. Nevertheless, the villagers have to spend large sums of money for fertilizer which has now become the major problem of the village.

The result of good harvests has affected village life in many ways. First, people can afford modern luxury items such as transistor radios, electric fans, and motorcycles. Secondly, since villagers have extra income from their harvests, they can hire laborers to work their fields, thus allowing their children to go to school beyond compulsory sixth grade education.

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However, these children are trained to help in the fields during busy transplanting and harvesting times. Actually, more than fifty percent of the teenagers who finish the junior level in secondary school come back to work in their families' fields. Most of them are girls.

Thirdly, when people earn more money from their crops, they become more generous in supporting the temple. Despite the fact that monks are very well supplied, the number of monks who stay permanently in the Hua Khao temple is quite small. The number of monks peaks during February-March when there are quite a few newly ordained monks added to the permanent ones. In 1982, the village committee and the temple committee agreed to raise money for the construction of a new crematorium. When it is finished, the temple will charge a fee for any cremation ceremony held there. This is modelled after the practice found in big cities, especially in Bangkok.

Due to improving economic conditions, the simple way of traditional village life is changing. Modern technology will increasingly affect the whole community.

**Categorization and performance of folksongs from Ban Hua Khao**

Altogether, fifty-four folksongs have been collected from Ban Hua Khao, including the *tham khwan* texts which are not actually sung but recited. These fifty-four songs are classified into two main groups as follows:

Ceremonial songs: There is no general term in Thai for ceremonial songs. Some folklorists and anthropologists use the term 'phleng phithikam', but people generally call a ceremonial song by its sub-category or by its specific name. Such as, 'læ khwan' (*tham khwan* text), 'phleng anchoen' (an invitation song sung in spirit possession games), or 'phleng hae nak' (a celebration song for the ordination ceremony). These ceremonial songs are sung in ceremonies or performed as an accompaniment to a rite of passage on different occasions. Also songs accompanying an agricultural rite or a fertility rite are grouped in this category, including the song sung in the rain-making ceremony, i.e. *phleng hae nang maeo*.
Social songs: Social songs are generally sung in festivals as a form of entertainment. They require no special occasion; however, people tend to choose a certain type of song to be sung on different occasions or at different types of festivals. Songs sung while working in the field or while working in groups are considered social songs since their purpose is fundamentally entertainment. Social songs may be sub-categorized into two groups: songs sung for entertainment in festivals, and songs sung for entertainment during the harvest.

**Significant roles of folksong in village life**

Folksong is perpetuated by oral tradition. Even when the folk singers become much more literate, they rarely use writing either for keeping texts for their own use or for teaching their students. Thus, a good memory is most necessary for folk singers all over the world.

Folksong is thus learned and transmitted orally from generation to generation. The only way one can achieve the skill is to become a student of an expert or a virtuoso. Folk singers do not talk about the creator or the owner of any particular song, but they will give credit to the expert teacher of that song. It seems impossible for folksingers to dictate the text of their song. They have to sing it. All these facts lead to the general qualifications of folksong: first, the simplicity of content and form; and second, the melody as a means of conveying the message.

In this paper, the folksong’s content will be analyzed within two main contexts: the relationship between man and the supernatural world, and the relationship between man and the socio-cultural world.

**Man and the supernatural world**

In nursery rhymes, children learn to assimilate themselves into the natural world of flora and fauna. In folksong, the supernatural world is introduced as a part of nature that the adult has to cope with. Supernatural beings are generally classified into two main groups: the benevolent spirits and the malevolent spirits. Among the benevolent ones are the guardian spirit of the city pole; the guardian spirit of the village proper (in the case of Ban Hua Khao, the village guardian spirit is *Chao Pho Khao Long* or the
spirit of the Long Hill), and the various territorial spirits, such as, the spirit of the forest (*Chao Pa*), the spirit of the hills and mountains (*Chao Khao*), the spirit of the rice (*Mae Phosop* or the Rice Goddess) and the spirit of the house compound (*Phra Phum*). This group also includes the heavenly spirits or *Thewada*, but they are usually referred to collectively, with no identification of individual spirits.

The malevolent spirits are those which tend to harm or cause trouble to people. They are identified either as spirits of people who died accidentally or violently or a sub-type of evil spirit such as *Phi Krasue*, *Phi Krahang*, or *Phi Pop*, which occasionally possesses and kills a person by eating his viscera. Most benevolent spirits are referred to as individual spirits, while the malevolent ones constitute a group or sub-type. It is believed that when someone dies suddenly or violently, that person's spirit wanders around in this world because it still wants to fulfil its role in this world.

The relationship between man and these spirits may be specified in terms of dependence and reciprocity. The benevolent spirits are supposed to give assistance and protection to human beings and receive sacrifices and offerings in return. In some situations, negotiation takes place between a human being and a spirit. For example, when a man gets sick, his relatives may have to promise a special offering to a particular spirit. If that offering cannot satisfy the spirit, more offerings will be made. Sometimes, when a person needs specific help from a particular spirit, he may promise that spirit a special offering. This seems to be a kind of bribery. However, villagers do not regard it as such. The spirit is like a human being; if you can please it, you have a better chance of getting help or favor. Since the way to please the spirit is to offer a sacrifice, it is therefore an exchange or a reciprocal promise, not bribery. As the villagers justify this promise of offerings, the interesting point is that they deal with the spirit as they do with human beings, except that the spirit has no visible body but more power, a supernatural power which human beings cannot possess or match.

In the case of malevolent spirits, the offering is made first. If it does not work, then the high-ranking benevolent spirit will be asked to give assistance. In some cases, the Buddhistic elements or some sacred objects involved with Buddhist ritual will be utilized to solve the problem.
It is noticeable that, in Ban Hua Khao, the distinction between benevolent and malevolent spirits is not clear cut. People believe that if a person behaves improperly towards a benevolent spirit, whether intentionally or not, the benevolent spirit may turn into a malevolent one, and thus can harm that person. This often happens in the case of the guardian spirit of the village. Sometimes, out of ignorance, a child may offend the guardian spirit and consequently gets sick. The parents have to make offerings to Chao Pho, after which the child recovers. Hence, one may conclude that whether a spirit will be benevolent or malevolent depends on how it is treated. In general, however, spirits are classified by their nature of origin as good or evil.

Most ceremonial and social songs collected in Ban Hua Khao concern benevolent spirits and the guardian spirit. These texts were originally part of the invocation song sung to the spirits to invite them to receive offerings or to witness rituals. From these texts, the relationship between man and the spirit world can be observed as follows:

**Man and the Agricultural spirit**

As Ban Hua Khao is an agricultural community, the spirit of the rice or Mae Phosop is the most important one. She is respected as a great benefactor, not only as the protector of the crops but also as the food provider, since the main staple in Thailand is rice. Thus, Mae Phosop is addressed as "mother" (mae), the protector and provider of food for her children. People call themselves luk (child) when talking to Mae Phosop in ceremonial songs. They respect her and act with the same proper behavior as they would toward their human mother. Children are taught not to drop the rice off their plate because such behavior will make Mae Phosop feel sad, and it is not good to treat the mother with such disregard. In brief, people feel grateful to Mae Phosop and behave properly in order to show their gratitude and respect.

In addition, when farmers perform rites to pay respect to Mae Phosop, they generally do not address her only as "Mae Phosop". They will specify many sub-types of rice, for example, Mae Khao Nak (the rice which yields a harvest later than other kinds), Mae Khao Bao (the rice which yields in
a short time), *Mae Inthanil, Mae Maha Manpu* (two special breeds). This personification reveals that farmers think of the different types of rice as human beings with a special identity. Thus, they call their rice by individual names and try to please each individual kind. It also shows that farmers have a close relationship with the rice, not just a relationship between man and the soil, but a more personal one.

The agricultural rites concerning Mae Phosop demonstrate also that villagers regard their occupation as the most important aspect of their lives. Whatever brings good results to their work will be given full attention.

Another point of interest is that since Mae Phosop is the symbol of fertility, most rituals linked to her are traditionally performed by women. Moreover, some rituals, such as the *rap khwan khao* (greeting of the spirit of the rice), are forbidden to men. This concept may be considered as one criterion for the division of labor in traditional Thai agricultural society. Specifically, since the women of the family perform most agricultural rites, it is through them that the ritual process and texts become transmitted, knowledge from which men are excluded. In fact, there is no actual taboo against teaching these texts to the men of the family. However, since men do not have to take up such duties, they seem to have no interest in learning them. There is no rule about the status of the woman who performs the rite; any woman in the family can do it if she has time or is assigned to do so.

*Man and the guardian spirits*

In actual life, there are many types of guardian spirits linked to the villagers' well-being and safety. However, only one type of guardian spirit is mentioned in the folksongs under consideration: the guardian spirit of the house compound, or *Phra Phum*. Even though there is only one reference to him, the concept of the relationship between this spirit and human beings is clearly revealed. In one *phleng choi* (a special type of social song), it is stated that:

If you (a widow) have a husband,
It is like having a san *Phra Phum*.
Wherever you go,
He will follow and protect you.
and earlier in the same song,

If you (a widow) have no husband,
It is like a fence with no thorns.

Thus, the thorn-fence, the husband, and the *Phra Phum* are compared to good and efficient forms of protection, specifically protection of the family or household. In a house compound, these three kinds of protection should not be lacking. A fence is a physical protection for both the house and the inhabitants, a *Phra Phum* provides spiritual protection, and a husband combines both physical and spiritual protection for a woman. However, this does not mean that the *Phra Phum* will protect only the woman in the house. Actually, the *Phra Phum* is more like a fence, protecting the whole house and the people within, including guests who stay overnight. Thus, when villagers have to stay overnight at someone else’s house, even that of relatives, they have to ask for approval and protection from the *Phra Phum* of that house. Failure to inform the *Phra Phum* may cause trouble, or, at the very least, nightmares for the guests.

From the villagers’ point of view, the *Phra Phum* is like a senior family member. He should be informed about whatever happens in the house. He is given offerings of food and flowers daily or at regular intervals.

The relationship between the family members and the *Phra Phum* is similar to that between younger and older relatives. However, the *Phra Phum* is not an ancestor spirit or *phi ban/phi ruan* that is well-known among the northern and the northeastern people.

*Man and the other spirits*

There are three categories of spirits discussed here: the heaven spirits or *thewada*, the territorial spirits, and the spirits invited in spirit possession games. The ancestral spirits and the house spirit will also be addressed on special occasions. They will usually be invited in the first part of the invocation text to come and receive offerings.

The spirits invited in spirit possession games are naturally of the lowest type, since they are spirits of animals and household utensils. Such spirit possession games are, for example, the monkey possession, the elephant possession, and the spirit of the wicker tray possession. The language
used in these invitation songs clearly indicates their statuses and also the villagers' attitude toward them. The relationship between man and these spirits is a "casual" relationship, much less formal than that between family members and the Phra Phum.

In conclusion, the relationship between man and the supernatural beings that are expressed through folksongs concern two major factors: the origins of spirits and the roles and statuses of such spirits. More intimate relationships are marked by the frequency of offerings made. And finally, the relationship is conceptualized as a family relationship. Kinship terms are commonly applied to these supernatural beings and thus, they are addressed as if they were human.

**Man and the socio-cultural world**

In his socio-cultural world, man has expanded the patterns of relationship from that of the immediate family during childhood to the more complicated patterns involved with people of different groups, with different roles and statuses.

During the stage of life as a member of society, occupational and economic awareness becomes the significant issue expressed through folksongs. The other issues are the relationships between a man and his family and between the monk and the layman.

**Occupational and economic awareness**

The topic of occupational and economic awareness becomes one of the main issues in folksongs. In fact, folksongs clearly reveal the village life and attitudes of an agricultural society. Even the language villagers use in their daily life and in these songs reflects images of an agricultural lifestyle.

Occupational problems and economic status are frequently illustrated as a conversational topic in everyday life and in songs. When a man starts his dialogue song (*phleng choi*), he usually asks a woman about her occupation:

Where is your house? Do you grow rice?
Or do some other type of farming?
Are you a vendor, carrying goods for sale?
Are you a child of a folk singer, or of a dancer?  
Do you earn your living by dancing or farming?

The first interesting point is that everyone is assumed to have a job. It does not matter what kind of job it is, but everyone should have one. Both men and women are assumed to work, to be self-supporting.

Since most villagers are peasants, the next questions about occupation continue in more detail about rice growing:

Do you grow wet rice or highland breed?  
How many bundles have you this year?  
And after threshing, how many have you got?

These are simple questions which farmers are accustomed to asking their friends, neighbors, and strangers as well. These questions are not regarded as being rude, interfering in other's business, or violating their privacy.Farmers realize that they have to depend on their crops as the major source of subsistence; therefore, to ask someone about their crops shows concern for that person's well-being and demonstrates an attitude of friendliness. The woman understands the cultural meanings of these questions, so she answers:

The broadcasting fields did not get enough water;  
The transplanting fields have become dry.  
All the paddy fields are withering,  
    There is only disaster everywhere.  
Only a few bundles are left at the corners of the fields,  
    Just enough to feed the guests who drop by.

Throughout these folksongs, agricultural knowledge is regularly illustrated. Each step of rice-growing, particular types of rice, and problems occurring during the cultivation season are mentioned in songs.

And because of their realization of the hardship involved in their work, they identify themselves as belonging to the same group. They have the same problems and, in a broader sense, the same lifestyle. As a woman says:
Your rice and mine are exactly the same. This does not mean, however, that villagers do not recognize occupations other than their own, and there is no negative attitude towards other people's work expressed in folksongs. Nevertheless, farming is the major occupation of this community, influencing not only their actual lives but also the language they use in everyday life, including their figures of speech as well.

Because farmers realize that their work is hard and that they cannot completely control factors such as nature, when they perform a benediction song or blessing song, they invoke an easy life without the farmers' hard-working activities:

May you become the master's wife;
    Sitting all day on a chair,
        Swinging your legs,
    Not needing to do any work.
May you become a successful merchant,
    Possessing cars and boats loaded with goods,
        at your own harbor.
May you be a general or a colonel,
May you be raised higher in rank.

*Man and his family*

Given the fact that most of the folk singers are usually of middle age, issues of relationships between men and women are undoubtedly the major topic of interest in these songs. Three main topics concerning relationships within the family context are as follows:

- ideas on the proper mate and the roles of a husband and wife;
- attitudes toward marriage and staying single;
- family conflicts

The selection of a proper mate for a man basically focuses on the most visible qualification, appearance, while a woman gives more attention to the qualifications expected of a leader of the family. However, the criteria of age and appearance are mentioned for both sides. The special qualification of a desirable husband is linked also to ordination as an important means of gaining knowledge and being trained as a mature man.
Connected closely to the topic of selection of a proper mate are the expected roles of a husband and a wife. This topic is clearly mentioned in the *tham khwan* texts for the wedding ceremony and in social songs such as *phleng choi*. For example, in the *tham khwan* text, the woman who now becomes a wife is taught to be well behaved, to be humble, and not to criticize the husband’ faults in front of others. The husband is taught to be nice to his wife, to speak nicely to her, not to get angry with her, and not to beat her. Interestingly enough, while the wife is taught to be afraid of the husband, he is taught to be considerate of his wife’s feelings (or *kreng chai*). Both are taught to compromise with each other. One may conclude that the concept of compromise is the basic ground for married life, as it is expressed through songs.

Since most folksongs concern courting and marriage, attitudes towards marriage and staying single, including being a widow or widower, frequently appear in these texts. The general attitude shown in songs is that marriage is an important phase of life which everyone should complete. Marriage is important not only for an individual but also for his family since usually in an agricultural society, a family needs labor for work in the fields.

The next issue following the concept of marriage is how the villagers feel about staying single and how they perceive the widow and widower in their community. Usually a person who remains single, either by choice or for other reasons, is not thought of as unusual. It is generally said that if a person can earn his living without trouble and does not depend too much on other people, he should have full authority to choose his own lifestyle.

Family conflicts expressed through folksongs generally focus on the problems of polygamy. This problem is reflected in the particular serial songs such as *phleng choi* and *phleng khorat*. In these songs, a dispute or quarrel between the first wife and the minor wife is one of the highlights. This is understandable since in actuality, there are many cases of a husband having two wives or more, whereas a wife with a lover is very rare. Villagers regard the latter as a serious breach of social and cultural norms.

In conclusion, man-woman relationships as expressed in songs are mainly concerned with situations and events occurring in real life. While the
concept of a proper mate generally remains an unobtainable ideal more than a practical goal, when it comes to the roles of husband and wife the ideal has a much more solid basis in reality. Moreover, these roles clearly underline the status of the man as an authority figure, a leader of the family, as opposed to that of the woman as a follower. When there is conflict between husband and wife, relatives on both sides get involved, since marriage does not cut a family member off from family ties. In fact, the force of other people's opinions, relatives or not, is such that villagers are concerned more with what other people think of them and their behavior than with their own moral concepts. In other words, social control is ultimately a more significant influence on behavioral patterns than is self-control.

The relationship between the monk and the layman

The content of folksongs frequently deals with knowledge and conceptions of Buddhism because village activities are usually centered around the temple. Moreover, the villagers's concepts and attitudes towards life are basically conditioned by Buddhist concepts such as the Law of Karma, reincarnation, and the merit-demerit dichotomy. These Buddhistic concepts are normally mixed with Brahmanistic and animistic elements, becoming "popular religion" or "popular Buddhism," not "sophisticated Buddhism".

In many songs (dialogue song) the singers utilize their knowledge of Buddhism to test their opponents' level of knowledge. Interestingly enough, the woman singer tends to use her knowledge of Buddhism specifically for this purpose when a man courts her in dialogue songs.

woman : I would like to ask you, my dear brother,
But I'm afraid you may feel offended.
What kind of man do people call "phi thit"?

man : They are those who know
What is right and what is wrong.
Is that right?

woman : "Pandita" really means a "scholar"
According to the scripture.
Don't you know that?
Well, you have been ordained,
But have learned nothing.
The woman not only tests the man's knowledge; she also criticizes him for being ordained in vain.

The songs also show the relationship between the layman and the monk, who are not separated from each other by the strict rules of the monastic life. The temple is the center of village activities and the monks traditionally act as the villagers' consultants in almost every aspect of life.

In *phleng hae nak* some small notions about the monk’s conduct are revealed. For example, the monk-to-be is taught not to kick (play) *takro* (a wicker ball) because he is supposed to be self-collected. In another song, the monk is satirized for being unable to divorce himself from his secular life and desires, the attraction of sexual relationships. A monk who is ordained after marriage is always the particular target of such teasing, because his wife usually stays in the same village and they can meet very often but must abstain from sexual relationship.

The above discussion shows the intimate relationship between the layman and the monk as well as the layman’s criticism of the monk’s conduct. While it is possible for the layman to criticize a monk, the monk is given high, respectful status.

In conclusion, folksongs play a significant role in adulthood socialization, both in the performing and the content of such songs. Patterns of relationships with the supernatural world which are rarely mentioned in childhood socialization are introduced through ceremonial and social songs. Their content shows both the patterns of relationships and expected roles for society members to perform, for their immediate family and their society as well. Social songs have significant roles, not only in bringing villagers together in public entertaining activities, but also in introducing to them a system of values and relationships with their fellow villagers. Through these songs, villagers learn to live with others and help maintain their community. At the same time, they assimilate and adjust the ideal norms they learned at an early age in order to cope with the present situation,
conditioned by the modern way of life which is gradually invading the traditional one they used to know.

**Folksong and socio-cultural change**

When we say that folksongs are perpetuated by oral tradition, it does not mean that all folksongs necessarily originated this way. A folksong can be developed from a popular city song and be sung in the folk setting. However, for the purpose of this study, folksong is defined as "songs which are current in the repertory of a folk group." The influence or inspiration may be exchanged between country and city people in both directions. George Herzog, a well-known scholar of folksong and folk music, gives his principle criterion for determining a folksong: "Whatever the sources, however, it is oral circulation that is the best general criterion of what is a folk song."³

As mentioned before, folksingers are rarely aware of origin, form, construction, or any aesthetic or analytic theory. They sing for their own pleasure as well as for their group and nearly everyone in the group knows the song very well. Even though not every one can sing, they can participate and appreciate this treasure together. Certainly there are some skillful singers whom people appreciate and respect as the virtuosos of the village or the leaders of the singing group. However, in most cases, one will find difficulty in distinguishing the performer and the audience. Almost everyone, including the children, can participate by singing the refrain, or usually by clapping their hands to help reinforce the rhythm. Only in some particular types of song has the performance been developed into a stage-show for which a real expert is needed. Thus, while lullabies are more properly sung by women and children's songs are monopolized by children, other categories of folksong do not exclude any performers on the basis of age, sex, or special aptitude.

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On a professional level, an individual singer or a group of singers may be called in on a special occasion, for example, to celebrate a wedding or ordination ceremony. These performers may get paid in cash. But usually, they will get a "...modest gift, feasting, and drinks rather than pay...." This also proves to be true among the folksingers of Ban Hua Khao. Few of them are professional singers. They may be farmers, gardeners, craftmen, or vendors, and they will perform folksong singing as an occasional or seasonal job in their free time, such as after the harvest, but they usually cannot survive by money gained from singing alone. They sing because they "love to sing and cannot give up singing."\(^4\)

Folksong texts are re-created through performance and transmission. Each singer naturally adds small modifications in his own style. This process of modification leads to variations in localities and regions, both in style of singing and in text. The process usually takes more than one generation and the possession of a song becomes a matter of locality or region than of a single person. People generally say that this song or that song belongs to this province or that village, which implies that such a modified version or style is well-known and appreciated by people in that particular area. However, "Every person has got a born right to sing it his own way...."\(^5\)

**Performance of folksong in village life**

As already mentioned in the part concerning the ethnographic setting and hamlet ecology, village life in Ban Hua Khao is changing quite fast and people follow the lifestyle of the city people in many ways. This has affected the performance of folksong in the village in many ways too. For example, a variety of the spirit offerings concerning rice growing, or ceremonies concerning *Mae Phosop* as well as other fertility rites, were

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\(^4\) Ibid., p. 1034.


performed in the past. Most of these rites have already died out. Some are combined into one rite such as rap khwan khao and tham khwan yung (greeting the spirit of Mae Phosop and blessing the barn); some have been revived in a slightly different form, usually with more Buddhistic elements. For instance, tham bun kieo and tham bun tan (offering before the harvest and making merit for the threshing ground) in which monks are invited to receive alms at the field or at the threshing floor. Now only remnants of the elaborate rites remain, in the form of food offerings to the spirit of the rice and also to the guardian spirit of the field. Usually there is no elaborate text, only simple invocations made as an invitation to the spirit.

Another significant change concerning ceremonial song is the tham khwan nak or calling the spirit of the monk-to-be which used to be one of the most important elements in the pre-ordination rite. Generally this rite is performed in the afternoon before the day of ordination. On this occasion, an expert performer (mo khwan) was traditionally called. Since it is very expensive, including the feast for relatives and neighbors and the wages for the mo khwan plus the ceremonial items, people now invite a monk to preach to the nak about the virtue of gratitude and preparation for entering the monastic life. This new practice, which began about ten years ago, has spread so fast that only one-third of the pre-ordination ceremonies in Ban Hua Khao were performed in the traditional style. However, people still spend a large sum of money for the feast on the eve of the ordination. Thus, this new idea has helped cut costs and at the same time it makes them feel that the ordination is perfectly complete. It is probable that the traditional tham khwan nak rite will die out soon in rural areas as it has in urban areas.

In the case of the social song, since modern agricultural techniques have influenced the traditional methods of farming, most activities have been changed. For example, many farmers rent a threshing machine which can finish the threshing within half a day instead of the several days it took in the past. They bring the machine right to the paddy fields. Thus, they no longer need a threshing floor. The threshing songs are sung no more. They also hire laborers during the harvesting; no one wants to sing reaping songs while working since they are paid by the amount harvested each day, not by the hour.
These songs have almost died out from the fields; however, they are still occasionally sung for entertainment in festivals. People have shifted from *phleng choi* (a particular type of dialogue song), *phleng song khrung*, or *phleng sam mai*, which are long dialogues and need special talent in singing, to these reaping and threshing songs which are shorter and which most people can sing together. In brief, these agricultural songs have been taken from the fields to the temple and house compound. Their function as a diversion while working has also been changed to that of public entertainment during festivals. Thus, it is likely that, in the future, two particular groups of social songs (songs sung in festivals and songs sung during the harvest) will become one, that is, those sung during festivals.

One observation about the content of *phleng choi* should be mentioned here. The content of *phleng choi*, one of the most popular types of dialogue song, does not, at present, deal only with courting or sexual relationships but also with other topics such as historical and contemporary events, as well as stories from folktales and legends. In one particular *phleng choi* from Ban Hua Khao, the main character is a member of parliament, a politician. Evidently, *phleng choi* not only records the villagers' lifestyle but also provides an outlet for the pressures in their lives.

**Conclusion**

Through folksongs, men and women talk to each other, introducing themselves, making friends with each other, teasing and attacking as part of entertaining each other. During festivals, these social songs are sung as the essential part of the villagers' entertainment. Thus, they really function as the means of social interaction among villagers. At the same time, they reveal the idea of social control and patterns of behavior in many aspects. More interestingly, these songs become an outlet for pressures caused by rules of social control. They give people an opportunity to express their feelings, thoughts, emotions and also their attitudes towards others as well as towards their own lives. Nowadays, such functions may be changing, as modern technological advances and new lifestyles affect the traditional lifestyle. These songs, as already discussed, reveal both continuity and change in form and content. They may become the folksongs of the new
generation, but what is obvious about these songs is that they reflect the deepest traditions and uppermost concerns of village life.
REFERENCES


